

OMB Questions for the Office of Research and Development

Examiner Rosenfield

OMB-FY2019ORD-0006 (IRIS & NPM Feedback Loops)

OMB Question #6: *What process is in place (formal and informal) for the IRIS program to gain feedback or recommendations from the other EPA NPMs? For example, when and how are OW's priorities communicated to IRIS?*

Note: This question includes formal and informal methods, but does not have to be a comprehensive list for each NPM. It could be examples of meeting times (annual, monthly, etc.) or phone calls that the programs schedule to communicate with one another. The purpose of this question is to get the general idea of how IRIS receives feedback from the programs, both in the planning process (prioritizing) and the feedback process.

ORD Answer:

ORD has a formal process through which its six National Research Programs (NRPs)* solicit priorities from the NPMs. This has typically occurred annually with engagement of the Assistant Administrators. In addition, the Deputy Assistant Administrators meet with their respective counterparts on a quarterly basis. OLEM, for example, sent its ORD priorities for FY 2018, and we are working through aligning those priorities with resources. Most NRPs liaise with one primary NPM---SHC with OLEM, ACE with OAR, SSWR with OW, CSS with OCSPP, and HSR with OHS. HHRA, on the other hand, supports the majority of NPMs, and therefore needs to liaise with them more frequently and at the cascading levels of the organization, including with Office and Division Directors. Below are examples of some processes in place to gain feedback and recommendations from NPMs regarding the IRIS Program:

- ORD National Program Directors (NPDs) hold annual meetings with program and regional offices, which are often designed to coincide with the meetings of the BOSC. The BOSC is particularly interested in the same question – formal and informal methods to receive input and feedback into the planning and implementation steps of ORD activities. The last meeting for HHRA, for example, was November 2016. As soon as the new BOSC is convened, the next meeting will be planned.
- To further facilitate and enhance NPM engagement, in FY 2017 NCEA made a critical hire, the Assistant Center Director (ACD) for Scientific Support. This position is dedicated to engaging EPA Program and Regional offices, and their international, state and tribal government partners, with the goal to improve NCEA's ability to be responsive to the dynamic needs of its prime consumers. The ACD convenes meetings with senior science contacts in EPA Program and Regional Offices around specific activities, for example with OW regarding drinking water priorities, OAR for risk and technology reviews, and with OPPT for IRIS support for TSCA first ten chemical risk evaluations. These meetings are as needed, but frequent; on average 2-3 meetings a week across the Agency. In addition to the ACD, these meetings often include the IRIS Director or senior scientists and assessment managers from across NCEA and the IRIS Program. Feedback from the NPMs has been very positive for this regular interaction.
- The IRIS Program holds EPA-wide monthly meetings. These meetings are intended to provide IRIS updates and maintain open communications around emerging or changing needs or priorities, and are regularly attended by representatives from multiple NPMs,

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including their Senior Science and Field staff, who provide ongoing feedback and recommendations to the IRIS program from the perspectives of various consumers of IRIS information (e.g., from the “boots on the ground” communicating risk at various government agencies to the senior manager making risk-based decisions).

- All IRIS products undergo review in the agency at various stages of formulation and development. In addition, we are identifying experts in program offices or regions who can provide ongoing programmatic input for assessments and ensure that the product continues to be relevant and timely to the various consumers.

The IRIS Multiyear Agenda: It is important to note that, along with the feedback activities described above, the IRIS Program has utilized a formal process to develop the IRIS agenda. Senior managers, staff, and executive leadership in the program and regional offices were engaged to solicit prioritization and rationale information, and to better understand how an assessment might be used. Scaled to the scope of the assessments and available resources, this effort resulted in the IRIS Multiyear Agenda that was published in 2015. As described in the response to OMB Question 5, in FY 2018---and likely annually, moving forward---we will reaffirm the partner needs and their commitment to the priorities, in particular in light of the new priorities of the Administrator and IRIS resources.

*Note: ORD National Research Programs (NRPs) include:

- Sustainable and Healthy Communities (SHC);
- Air, Climate, and Energy (ACE);
- Safe and Sustainable Water Resources (SSWR);
- Chemical Safety for Sustainability (CSS);
- Homeland Security Research (HSR); and,
- Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA).